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reinforced during the three years following 1955 when it formed the government. Since then it has been streamlined and hardened by the Party's almost constant struggle with the Church. Frequent meetings now keep the rank and file in close touch with the national leaders. The Party's newspaper, which became a daily shortly after Mintoff resigned in 1958, disseminates propaganda and news of Labour activities as well as international news, and so provides the leaders with an important contact with members.

The MLP is now organized in three tiers: at the national level, at the level of the electoral district, and at the village level. The structure of the MLP, unlike that of its rivals, rests very firmly on its village level organization. Virtually every village in Malta has its own Local Committee, the members of which are elected annually by the formal, dues-paying members among the MLP supporters in the village. In most villages there is also a Party club, of which the Local Committee members are the officers. The Labour Club, which is usually equipped with a bar, a television set and a billiards table, serves as the social centre for the MLP group in the village. Its frequent activities keep the supporters united, as do the attacks of their enemies. The Club has become something of a refuge for MLP supporters who are now cut off from many village activities by the stigma which the Church has attached to them. A number of Local Committees have organized sub-committees for women and children.

Every Local Committee in each electoral district elects one member to sit on the District Committee. This Committee acts as a clearing house for propaganda and electoral tactics. During the three years that the Party formed the government, the District Committees were also points at which district-wide complaints, patronage and public works were discussed with the district MLA's.

At the apex of this pyramid is the National Executive of the Malta Labour Party. This is composed of representatives from all the District Committees, from the Parliamentary group and from the Labour League of Youth. The Party officers and additional members of the Executives are elected at an annual General Conference. All electoral candidates and major policy decisions are confirmed there. Conference delegates are representatives of the Local Committees of each village and town.

During the period the MLP was in power, the Local Committees

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of new associations in the village and the increased activity of political parties.

During the mid-'fifties emigration drained away many of the most active supporters of the partiti. In 1954 alone, no fewer than two dozen men between 18 and 38 left the village for Australia and Canada. Each club lost key bandsmen, and the two bands, already heavily bolstered with outside players, never recovered. A constantly improving bus service enabled young men to go to the 'talkies' in other villages, or just stroll up and down Kingsway in Valletta – a very popular pastime with young people from all over Malta – instead of spending the evening in their village clubs. During this period the Football Club, MUSEUM and Catholic Action were established in the village and began to draw potential partit leaders into other spheres of activity. The Football Club was particularly damaging in this respect. As a neutral social club it provided a place where the young men of the two partiti, who normally never entered one another's clubs, could meet. A number of friendships developed between them, and it soon became the most popular club in the village. Finally, the increased activity of the national political parties during the elections in 1950, 1951, 1953 and 1955 drew the attention of the villagers away from purely parochial concerns and bound them up in rivalries of a different order, which often cut across traditional allegiances. This created factions within the clubs and weakened the partiti.

Rivalry flared up again in 1960, when the supporters of St. Martin, intent upon celebrating the centenary of their patron, staged the greatest festa in the history of the village. But the political and religious fervour of the 1961 election campaign soon captured the attention of the partisans, and the festa of the following year was a pale shadow of the gala spectacle of the year before.

Before proceeding any further, we must unravel the rather complicated tangle of partit, club and confraternity. All festa partiti are composed of three groups: (i) the band club, which provides the leadership of the partit and includes most of the active male supporters, many of whom are also members of (ii) the confraternity allied with the partit or dedicated to its patron, and (iii) the rank and file of men, women and children who are members neither of the confraternity nor of the club, but still support the partit against its rival. The central strand running through all